

Guidelines for School Administrators: Employing Educational Sign Language Interpreters

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Guidelines for School Administrators: Employing Educational Sign Language Interpreters

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general information for and about the use of educational interpreters in a school setting. The guidelines are intended for use by educational administrators to assist in hiring interpreters for the educational setting. Students who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind may need the services of an educational interpreter.

What do interpreters do?

Interpreters are specially trained individuals who facilitate communication between people who use sign language and those who do not. The interpreter, in the educational setting, is a professional member of the school staff and should receive the title of educational interpreter as suggested in the report by the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting (1992).

What is the role of an educational interpreter?

The educational interpreter is a member of the educational team. Although some duties may be specific to a student, generally, the role of an educational interpreter is to:

- Interpret oral communication into sign language and signed communication into spoken English;
- Participate as a member of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team (The educational interpreter cannot participate as a member of the team and interpret the meeting simultaneously. If an interpreter is needed at the IEP meeting, it is recommended that another interpreter be secured to interpret the meeting.);
- Adhere to the rules of confidentiality required of all school personnel;
- Convey the content of the message clearly and accurately according to the receptive language level of the student (as described in the IEP) and in the spirit of the speaker;
- Report student related concerns to the appropriate educational personnel, as determined by the IEP team;
- Work collaboratively with the student's educational team (i.e., general education teacher, disability specific teacher, administrators, and other support personnel);
- Meet minimum requirements as defined by the hiring agency;
- Prepare for interpreting assignments including the vocabulary and content knowledge of the subject matter;
- Tutor students only under direction and supervision of licensed educators, professional personnel, or both, who are authorized to provide direct services to the student;
- Make adaptations for the student only under the direction and supervision of licensed educators, professional personnel, or both, who are appropriately authorized to provide direct services to the student;

- Assist the IEP team in data collection;
- Assist in communication throughout the school day and in a variety of settings in accordance with the IEP (i.e., peer interactions, recess, lunch, and emergency drills);
- Comply with non-interpreting assignments when it does not adversely effect the communication needs of the student;
- Work collaboratively with the IEP team to clarify role regarding student disciplinary actions during the school day.

The presence of disabilities, in addition to hearing loss, alter the traditional role of the educational interpreter. For a student who is deaf or hard of hearing with additional disabilities, an educational interpreter provides access to the general curriculum. However, any changes to the traditional educational interpreter role will be determined by the IEP team.

The educational interpreter has specialized skills and training beyond those of a general classroom paraprofessional. The educational interpreter, in this role, is not performing duties as a licensed teacher and is not a replacement for a teacher. Although an educational interpreter may provide information as part of the IEP team, he/she is not the main contact between the school and family for information regarding the student.

When do I know I need to hire an educational interpreter?

A student's need for an educational interpreter is based on the IEP team's decision. As stated in IDEA 34 CFR 300.346 (a)(2):

(iv) Consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers, and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are part of a heterogeneous group. An identical hearing loss will affect two people differently. The impact of a hearing loss is influenced by several factors. When determining the need for an educational interpreter, teams need to take into consideration, among others, the following factors:

- Degree and severity of hearing loss;
- Age of onset of the hearing loss;
- Age of the student;
- Ability to attend to the educational interpreter;
- Ability to differentiate between the role of a teacher vs. the role of an educational interpreter;
- Age at amplification;
- Receptive language skills (aural, oral, and sign);

- Expressive language skills (oral and sign);
- Cognitive processing ability;
- Classroom acoustics and environment, such as group discussions, open classrooms, signal to noise ratio, and quality of the teacher's voice;
- Family communication;
- Learning style of the student;
- Willingness, on the part of the student, to utilize an educational interpreter.

Teams may utilize a variety of tools to determine if a student requires the services of an educational interpreter. Teams may choose to use specialized assessments for students with additional disabilities. Person Centered Futures Planning, environmental and communication assessments such as Analyzing the Communication Environment (ACE), or Time to Learn, are some useful tools. Information about these resources may be obtained by calling the Deafblind Project Consultant, Susan Brennan, who is listed as a resource in the back of this brochure (Resources, Brennan, page 13).

Are educational interpreters required to be licensed or certified in Iowa?

At the time of this printing, educational interpreters are not required to be licensed or hold certification. The *Code of Iowa* only mandates sign language interpreters hold certification “in a legal proceeding or at time of arrest” (Iowa Code 622B and 804.31 respectively).

An “Educational Interpreter” is an “authorized special education paraprofessional” (see Iowa Rules of Special Education 41.10(2)(b.)). As a paraprofessional, educational interpreters shall:

41.10(1)

- Complete appropriate preservice and ongoing staff development specific to the functions to be performed. The agency shall make provisions for or require such completion prior to the beginning of service wherever practicable and within a reasonable time of the beginning of services where the preentry completion is not practicable;
- Work under the supervision of professional personnel who are appropriately authorized to provide direct services in the same area where the paraprofessional provides assistive services. (Note: As an example, it would be appropriate for an educational interpreter to work under the supervision of a teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.);
- Not serve as a substitute for appropriately authorized professional personnel.

During the 2001 legislative session, Deaf Services Commission of Iowa (DSCI) submitted a bill to the Iowa legislature requiring all interpreters to be licensed, including educational interpreters. The bill was not acted upon during the 2001 legislative session. Due to budget concerns, the bill was not submitted during the 2002 legislative session.

Since 1994, the Iowa Leadership Group: Educational Audiology and Education of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students, and the Iowa AEA Directors of Special Education have supported the recommendation that all newly hired educational interpreters either have completed a two-year interpreter training program or have demonstrated competency using the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). The EIPA is an assessment designed to assess the skills (signing skills and knowledge skills) of educational interpreters working in the educational setting. It is to the school district's benefit to ensure that educational interpreters are able to fulfill the communication requirements as outlined in the student's IEP. This may be documented through performance-based assessments of interpreting knowledge and skill, such as the EIPA. EIPA is now a video-taped stimulus assessment of interpreting skills. There are a total of 39 measures in four major assessment areas: intonation, grammar and spatial representation when signing, ability to read student sign language, sign vocabulary and pragmatic representation of overall behaviors. Scores in each of the four assessment areas are averaged by three trained evaluators for an overall score of 1 thru 5, with 5 being high. The regionally accepted standard for an entry-level educational interpreter using the EIPA is a score of 3.5. A written assessment of knowledge skills is being developed. The EIPA is being used in 14 states and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). It is a state-mandated test in five states.

Iowa is a partner with nine other states and the BIA in the Regional Assessment System (RAS) for educational interpreters. The RAS project is directed by Dr. Bern Jones, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas. In Iowa, the RAS will arrange evaluation sites and test administration at special times during the year. The current price of the EIPA is \$225. For instructions about participation in an EIPA assessment, please check the RAS website at <http://web.jccc.net/academic/ras> or contact Marsha Gunderson (Resources, Gunderson, page 13) (See Appendix II) for information in obtaining a pre-hire screening of interpreting skills.

Where do I go from here?

Hiring an educational interpreter.

Step 1 – Now that we know an educational interpreter needs to be hired, the first step is to write a job description. Examples of job descriptions are included in Appendix I. You may choose to include special adaptations necessary for the education of the student, such as tactile sign, use of touch cues or other specialized communication modalities when writing the description. Other things to keep in mind include:

- Job responsibilities;
- Instructional setting;
- Duration of contract;
- Minimum qualifications;
- Experience and preferred credentials;
- Application deadline;
- Salary and benefits (When determining salary levels, take into consideration the educational interpreter's knowledge, skills, experience, education, and certifications held.);
- Contact person.

Step 2 – Determine who should be part of the interview team. Include someone knowledgeable about the student’s communication needs and issues of deafness. Include someone on the interview team who is familiar with interpreting. Although parents are members of the IEP team, it is not recommended that the parents be involved with the interview process.

Step 3 – Determine how to evaluate the candidate’s sign and communication abilities according to the skills stated in the job description. Knowledge of sign language does not indicate interpreting ability. They are two different skills. The only way to determine interpreting competency is through an evaluation. Boys Town National Research Hospital has a pre-hire screening evaluation available with a 72-hour turn-around time. See Appendix II for information in obtaining this pre-hire screening evaluation of interpreting skills.

Step 4 – After an individual has been hired, it is recommended that the hiring agency:

- Determine the educational interpreter’s supervisor;
- Assign a day-to-day supervisor who is knowledgeable in sign language, communication adaptations, or both, according to the individual needs of the student, and who is authorized to provide direct services in the same area. This is typically a teacher of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (See 41.10(1)(b));
- Assign an interpreting mentor;
- Provide periodic evaluations including overall job performance and interpreting competency.

Continuing education opportunities specific to interpreting should be made available to educational interpreters in order to encourage the continual improvement of skills. (See 41.10(1)(a.))

What happens when we have students with multiple disabilities including deafblindness?

Students with hearing loss and additional disabilities present unique challenges for educational interpreters. Students who are deafblind have significant vision and hearing losses. The IDEA definition of deafblindness states that a “child must have both an auditory and visual impairment, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and education problems that he/she cannot be properly accommodated in special education programs either for the hearing impaired or visually impaired child.” (source - Rules 281 – 41.5(256B, 34 CFR 300)

“The learner with deafblindness is often missing the *context* for learning and interacting... An interpreter for a person who is deaf, but has good use of vision, will not only interpret the conversation directed specifically to that person; the interpreter will also interpret conversations going on around the person who is deaf. In this way, the social context around the

person is captured. However, in this case, the individual can also see who is interacting, how he or she is behaving, and his or her facial expressions. An interpreter for a person with deaf-blindness using sign/tactile sign language has a bigger job (Haring & Romer, 1995). This interpreter will often describe the visual context around the learner in addition to interpreting the conversations, lecture, or discussion. He or she might tell the student about the student seated next to him who has a comic book inside his history book, or describes the facial expressions of the teacher as some students present a funny skit. The interpreter tries, to the best of his or her ability, to give the learner with deafblindness a visual picture of the social scene.”¹

Students with deafblindness are a heterogeneous group who may require specialized communication. Educational team members need to be aware of a variety of communication options in order to determine an appropriate method of communication to use with the child based on his/her needs. These methods of communication include, but are not limited to:

- Tactile sign
- Manual sign
- Close proximity interpreting
- Touch cues
- Object cues
- Picture cues
- Gestures
- American Sign Language
- Oral communication
- Side-by-side communication
- One-handed or two-handed communication
- Assistive technology, including computer generated text

When interpreting for students with deafblindness, educational interpreters must incorporate the following factors:

- Convey the message using the student’s mode, style and speed of communication;
- Provide a description of the full environment;
- Establish a feedback system between educational interpreter and student to allow for interaction;
- Establish a symbol or sign to use in case of emergency;
- Wear appropriate attire (solid color shirt contrasting with skin tone);
- Determine appropriate distance and seating between the educational interpreter and the student depending upon the environment, type of sign used and visual field loss;
- Determine acceptable placement of hands within the signing space depending upon the student’s visual needs;
- Consider environmental factors such as background noise, lighting, glare or shadows;
- Build breaks into the student’s schedule due to the fatiguing nature of interpreting, both physically and mentally. The frequency of breaks will be based on the intensity and type of interpreting as well as the needs of the student.

Who will help me?

This guide is only a beginning point for school administrators when considering the educational interpreting needs of students who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind. It is suggested you get in touch with your local contact listed in the AEA “*Iowa Leadership Group: Audiology and Education of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students Directory*” for assistance (located in Resources, Page 11). At the conclusion of the Resources, you will find a list of additional local, state, and national contacts.

References

- Rowland, C. & Schweigert, P (1993). *Analyzing the Communication Environment: An Inventory of Ways to Encourage Communication in Functional Activities*. Tucson, AZ: Communication Skill Builders.
- Rowland, C. & Schweigert, P. (1999). *Time to Learn: An environmental inventory to help teachers design learning activities for children who are deafblind*. Portland, OR: Chanty Rowland and Philip Schweigert.
- Ohio Guidelines for Educational Interpreters* (2000). Columbus, OH: Department of Education.
- Guide for Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa* (1998). Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services.
- National Task Force on Educational Interpreting. (1989). *Educational Interpreting for Deaf Students* (Occasional Paper). Rochester, NY: The National Technical Institute for the Deaf.
- Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education* (2000). Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services. [website]
- ¹Haring, N. & Romer, L. (1995).(page 396) *Welcoming Students Who Are Deafblind Into Typical Classrooms: Facilitating School Participation, Learning, and Friendships*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Frequently Used Terms/Definitions

American Sign Language (ASL) – A visual-gestural language which has its own grammar and syntax.

Cued Speech — A system of using eight handshapes in combination with four locations near the face to visually represent spoken English.

Gestures — Body movements which are used as communication between individuals. Body gestures may be used to approximate ASL signs for students with multiple disabilities.

Manually Coded English — Systems created to represent English using natural and invented signs in English word order. (e.g., Signing Exact English (SEE 2), Signed English)

Object/picture cues — These are real objects, or pictures of objects, that are used by a student to indicate a change of activity, daily calendar, or both and choice making opportunities.

Oral interpreting — The process of understanding the speech and/or mouth movements of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and repeating the message in spoken English; also the process of paraphrasing/transliterating a spoken message with or without voice and with natural lip movements and gestures.

Signed English – A manually coded English system devised as a semantic representation of English for children between the ages of 1 and 6 years. American Sign Language signs are used in English word order with 14 sign markers being added to represent a portion of the inflectional system of English.

Signing Exact English (SEE 2) – A manually coded English system that represents literal English, making visible everything that is not heard, and supplementing what a child can get from hearing and speechreading.

Tactile Sign – A method in which an interpreter signs and the student who is deafblind places his/her hands over the hands of the interpreter.

Touch cues – Cues that are used on a person's body in combination with verbalizations, in order to indicate a change in activity, transition or change of body position. For example, a student may be touched under the arms to indicate that he/she is to stand up.

Resources

Iowa Leadership Group: Audiology and Education of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students
(To view a current list available on-line, go to www.iadeaf.k12.ia.us then click on 'Resources' then click on 'Audiology and Education of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students Directory')

AEA 1

Tom Raulerson, MEd, MS

Sector Coordinator

Keystone Area Education Agency 1

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West Union, IA 52175-0268

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AEA 2

Marlys Ebaugh

Department Head, Hearing Department

Northern Trails AEA 2,

P.O. Box M

Clear Lake, IA 50428

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800-392-6640 V/TTY

FAX: 641-357-3201

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AEA 3

Judy Mischke, MAT

Lead Person for Hearing/Vision Department

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Cylinder, IA 50528

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AEA 4

Beth Beeman, MA, DPH

Supervisor, Hearing Division

Area Education Agency 4

1382 4th Avenue NE

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AEA 5

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Contact Person

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AEA 6

Karen Christensen

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AEA 6

909 South 12th Street

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Supervisor Itinerant Teachers of the Hearing Impaired

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563-359-1371 *or*

563-354-6281 TTY

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Grant Wood Area Education

Agency 10,

200 Holiday Road

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Grant Wood Area Education Agency 10,

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Iowa's Systems Change Project for Deafblindness

Iowa Department of Education
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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Phone: 515-281-3954 *or*
1-800-645-4579, ext. 1208
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Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) Pre-hire Evaluations

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Omaha, Nebraska 68131

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Iowa School for the Deaf (ISD)

1600 South Hwy 275
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Website: www.iadeaf.k12.ia.us

Deaf Services Commission of Iowa (DSCI)

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DB-Link

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**Educational Interpreter Performance
Assessment (EIPA) Information**

Website:

<http://stripe.colorado.edu/~schick/EIPA/EIPA.html>

**Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf, Inc. (RID)
Certification Explanation of Certificates**

Website:

<http://www.rid.org/expl.html>

Code of Ethics

Website:

<http://www.rid.org/coe.html>

Appendix I

Job Description Educational Interpreter

Minimum requirements:

Prefer graduate of interpreter training program or equivalent experience. Preference given to candidates who demonstrate proficiency on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), national, or regional certification.

Excellent interpersonal skills.

Ability to maintain effective working relationships with students, teachers, and other providers of educational services.

Responsibilities:

- Interpret oral communication into sign language (voice-to-sign) and signed communication into spoken English (sign-to-voice).
- Conveys the content of the message clearly and accurately according to the receptive language level of the student (as described in the IEP) and in the spirit of the speaker.
- Adheres to the hiring agency's rules of confidentiality.
- Participates as a member of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team.
- Works collaboratively with the IEP team members.
- Assists the IEP team in data collection.
- Reports student related concerns to the appropriate educational personnel, as determined by the IEP team.
- Works in collaboration with the teacher, prepares for interpreting assignments by obtaining and reviewing future subject matter, vocabulary, content knowledge, etc.
- Tutors students only under the direction and supervision of the teacher or other professional personnel.
- Makes adaptations for the student only under the direction and supervision of the teacher or other professional personnel.

- Assists in facilitating communication throughout the school day and in a variety of school settings in accordance with the IEP (peer interactions, recess, lunch, emergency drills, etc.).
- Complies with non-interpreting assignments when the assignment does not adversely affect the communication needs of the student.
- Works collaboratively with the IEP team to clarify role regarding student disciplinary actions during the day.

Reports to:

Building Principal. Day-to-day supervision will be in conjunction with the general education teacher and the teacher for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Appendix II

Pre-hire Screening Version

EIPA — The Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment

Brenda Schick & Kevin Williams
Boys Town National Research Hospital

Qualified Educational Interpreters

Immediate Screening of Interpreters by the Nationally-Recognized EIPA® Diagnostic Center at Boys Town National Research Hospital

You are hiring an educational interpreter. How do you know the individual is qualified?

If you need an immediate answer to whether an applicant is qualified to interpret in a classroom, the EIPA Pre-Hire Screening Version is designed to help you. Within two days, the EIPA evaluation team will evaluate an applicant's interpreting performance on videotape. They will assign one of three general rankings to the interpreting performance.

The Pre-Hire Screening Version uses specially-designed stimulus videotapes that show real classroom settings and interviews with children who are deaf. The tapes are ecologically valid in that they represent what educational interpreters do everyday.

The EIPA

The Educational Performance Assessment (EIPA) is a process designed to evaluate the interpreting skills of interpreters who work with children. There are two offerings utilizing this tool; an actual EIPA Full Evaluation and now, an EIPA Pre-Hire Screening Assessment.

I need to hire an interpreter this week!

An actual EIPA assessment takes approximately six weeks to administer and score. While this in-depth tool provides educational interpreters with great information for their professional development, it is not feasible for administrators who need to hire an educational interpreter quickly. The EIPA Pre-Hire Screening Version uses the basic principles of the EIPA but is designed to give more general feedback very quickly.

Why is it important to hire a qualified educational interpreter?

An educational interpreter serves as a critical member of the educational team serving a child who is deaf or hard-of-hearing. When an interpreter does not have adequate skills, the child receives information that is incomplete, distorted, and often confusing. No one can learn in these conditions, especially not a developing child.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) specifies that an educational interpreter must be qualified to provide those services. Skill and expertise are required to judge whether a person has the complex attributes needed to interpret. Most school districts do not have an individual who can make these judgments. How do you know if you are adequately serving the child who is deaf or hard-of-hearing?

States are mandating evaluation or certification for educational interpreting skills.

Many states are recognizing the need to insure that an educational interpreter is qualified. For many states, laws and departments of education regulations have established minimal skills that are required in order to interpret in a classroom setting. Currently, states that require minimal standards include: Colorado, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nevada, Kansas, and Nebraska. Many other states are currently working on establishing standards.

Many states require the EIPA for all educational interpreters.

The full EIPA evaluation is required by many states in order to insure minimal qualifications for educational interpreters. The EIPA is one of the few tools that specifically addresses interpreting for children.

The Pre-Hire Evaluation Process:

- Request pre-hire stimulus materials from the EIPA Diagnostic Center.
- Follow the directions to collect two samples of interpreting.
- Send the videotape to the EIPA Diagnostic Center using the pre-addressed, pre-paid mailing envelope.
- A trained evaluation team will assign a general rating and will make brief comments about the applicant's performance.
- The assessment report and recommendations for hire will be returned by overnight mail.

EIPA Pre-Hire Ratings

Three general ratings are used. Please note that specific skill areas are not rated, as they are in the full EIPA.



Skills at or above the required level. Recommended full EIPA within one year of employment.



Hire with caution. This individual requires skilled supervision. Recommended full EIPA within one year.



Not recommended for hire.

What the EIPA Pre-Hire Screening Version Does Not Do

The Pre-Hire Screening Version is intended as a rapid means of obtaining an overall rating of an applicant's skills. It is not intended as an in-depth assessment and will not meet state requirements for a full EIPA assessment. It is intended to help administrators make a quick decision regarding hire. If an interpreter receives a "Skills at or above the required level" rating, it does not mean that the interpreter can meet a state's minimal requirements.

EIPA Creators

Brenda Schick, Ph.D., University of Colorado

Dr. Schick specializes in children's development of sign language, cognitive skills, and the linguistics of American Sign Language.

Kevin Williams, M.S.

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Mr. Williams has a Master's degree in teaching interpreting. He specializes in the evaluation of skills for interpreters who work in the public schools. He holds RID certification, CI and CT.

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